

I introduced this legislation because I believe strongly that our commitment to servicemembers doesn't stop at the end of their tours. I believe that commitment doesn't stop at all, ever. And a critical part of this commitment—of what our country should do to make sure those who sacrificed so much for us can live the lives they hoped for—is helping seriously wounded veterans start families so that those who put their lives on hold and on the line have the opportunity to achieve that important goal.

Caring for our veterans should never be a partisan issue, and helping our wounded warriors start families should rise above the petty political fights we see too often in Washington, DC. So I was very proud to work with Republicans on the Veterans' Affairs Committee on a bipartisan compromise, one that should have allowed my veterans health care act to pass through the committee today with strong bipartisan support, as it has in the past. And until yesterday, that was exactly what I thought was going to happen. My bill was on the agenda. It was going to come up for a vote, and I thought it was going to pass. That is why I am so disappointed and truly angry that Republicans on the Veterans' Affairs Committee decided yesterday to leap at the opportunity to pander to their base, to poison the well with the political cable news battle of the day and turn their backs on these wounded veterans.

Just a few Republicans with just a few poison-pill amendments have turned our bipartisan effort to help wounded veterans into a partisan effort to attack women's health care. I find that shameful. That is why, after it became clear that there was not a path to getting those political amendments withdrawn today, I spoke with Chairman ISAKSON and I asked him to pull the bill from the markup rather than see it become a vehicle for partisan, political attacks.

I know some Republicans are trying to use this latest issue as just one more opportunity to roll back the clock and take away women's health care options. We can have that fight. We have had it many times before. But we should not be putting veterans in the middle of it. Don't take something that should be above politics—our sacred duty to our veterans—and pull it down into the muck of petty politics. It is not fair to these veterans and it is not fair to their families, who have been hoping and praying for the opportunity to have children. It is not fair to the veterans and servicemembers, who don't want to see their health care become just one more political football. And it is certainly not fair to our constituents, who send us to Congress expecting us to stand together and support those who sacrificed so much for all of us.

I am going to keep fighting for them and for this effort. I am not going to let those who put politics ahead of vet-

erans and servicemembers get their way.

I truly do hope Republicans reconsider this absolutely shameful approach today and work with us to get this bill done.

I yield the floor.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The Senator from Connecticut.

Mr. BLUMENTHAL. Mr. President, I join my extraordinarily dedicated and distinguished colleague from Washington State in expressing my regret that this bill will not be on our agenda today, and I thank her for championing a cause that matters so vitally to our military men and women, which is the cause of fairness to our veterans and putting our veterans above politics.

The bill she has advocated steadfastly and so eloquently provides services to wounded women warriors who want to have children and cannot do so because of those wounds of war. It makes available to them modern medicine, just as we are trying to do in other areas where the signature wounds of war inflict such damage on our wounded warriors. They deserve the right to treatment that enables them to have families, enables them to overcome those wounds of war that interfere with their ability to have children.

That is important not only to them but to their families, to their husbands. Many of their husbands are themselves veterans. This issue has ramifications way beyond the individuals involved. It is a matter of putting our veterans above politics, which traditionally has been our practice on the Veterans' Affairs Committee.

I am very proud to serve as the ranking member of that committee, to have worked with Senator MURRAY in her tireless efforts on this bill going back years. She has been rightly recognized for those efforts. Today I very much regret the tradition of our committee—putting veterans above politics—has succumbed to this threat; that the bill offered by Senator MURRAY will become mired down in issues that have nothing to do with providing IVF services to our wounded women warriors.

The amendments that have been offered are completely irrelevant and extraneous to the objectives of the bill. Make no mistake, they have nothing to do with protecting women, they have nothing to do with enabling our women veterans to have children and overcome those wounds of war. They are completely irrelevant, indeed contrary to the objectives of that bill. Yet they will now cause this bill to be removed from the agenda.

I just want to say to my colleague and fellow member of that committee that I am absolutely determined to find a path forward for this bill. It will be a priority of mine personally. I know it is a priority of the Senator from Washington, and I will join her in ensuring that our colleagues know we are determined to move forward, to find a path to pass this measure, and to

make sure our women veterans are recognized for the heroes they are.

These amendments are a disservice to them. Very simply, they are disrespectful to the women who sacrificed so much, who have suffered the same wounds as our men, and who receive less respect by virtue of this bill being withdrawn. I am hopeful we can work with Senator ISAKSON, chairman of the committee, to find that path forward. He has been very bipartisan in his approach, and I thank him for his efforts in that respect.

I will redouble my efforts to make sure we keep faith with our women veterans, enabling them to overcome those injuries that prevent them from having children and giving up the benefit of their being such great parents and giving our Nation great children, which is our obligation on this committee, in this body, and in this country.

Mr. President, I yield the floor.

I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

DRIVE ACT

Mr. INHOFE. Mr. President, in a moment I am going to be going over and concentrating on some of the things that are in this bill, just concentrating on bridges, something people are not as aware of as they should be. Now what I am talking about is that sometime today we are going to be repeating the vote that we had yesterday, except this time we should be able to get it adopted.

I don't criticize any of the Democrats who voted against the motion to proceed to the highway bill yesterday because they did not get information in a timely fashion. It was our fault that they did not get the information until about 30 minutes before the vote. I understand that. Now they have had 24 hours to look it over. I think they will be pleased to support the long-term highway bill. So I was not one who complained about that.

That vote will take place today. That is to get us to the bill, so we can start on amendments. I am going to ask as many of our Members to bring down amendments, if they have amendments, so we can get them in the queue to discuss. There are three committees involved. The very largest piece of the bill is the Environment and Public Works Committee, which is the committee that I chair.

When I say the vast majority of that, what I am talking about is 80 percent of the bill. So that has been available for inspection by the public, by the Democrats, the Republicans, by all of the Members ever since June 24. June

24 is when we passed this bill out of the committee by a unanimous vote. Every Democrat, every Republican on the committee voted for it.

Now, there are some people, I suppose, who are going to be playing politics with this bill on this vote. They have to realize this is an issue that needs to be addressed. I would say this, there are two things that were voiced as objections. Some voted no because they did not get everything they wanted in the bill. Some of them thought they would be able to get a better deal.

Let me just address that. The bill is too important to play politics with. If we wait until we have more time, then we are going to be in trouble and miss the construction season. The problem with this is, particularly those Northern States will miss an entire construction season if we do the alternative. What is the alternative? The alternative is to go back; instead of a 6-year-funded reauthorization bill, go back to short-term extensions. Short-term extensions are an ineffective use of highway dollars. Short-term extensions are not the conservative position but they also would miss an entire construction season. I understand that the House is talking about trying to do an extension to the end of the year. If they do that, then States like Pennsylvania—that is where Congressman SHUSTER is from—will miss an entire construction season. So I think that is critical.

If you talk to any Governor, any mayor, and any State department of transportation about the urgency of the timing of this bill, they will tell you that if we miss this opportunity to authorize a 6-year bill, with 3 years of identified funding this summer, we will miss the 2016 construction season. So the strongest supporters of this bill are the officials closer to the people at home—the mayors, the Governors, the State departments of transportation. So that is what we are going to be faced with.

To address the second point and objection, I have been approached by many Members on both sides of the aisle who have said they are planning to vote no today because their program did not get enough funding for Amtrak or bike trails or sidewalks or something else in this bill. We did not go far enough toward their project.

Well, look, I am in the same situation. This will be my sixth highway bill that I have actually authorized. Three of those I was the primary sponsor. I can tell you these bills are about compromise. Not everybody gets exactly what they want. I assure you I did not get everything I wanted in our unanimous EPW markup with Senator BOXER. Now, keep in mind, Senator BOXER is a very proud liberal, I am a very proud conservative. Yet we agreed wholeheartedly on this. We led the fight to come out with a unanimous bill.

The House is watching us very closely. They are even discussing taking our

good work, doing it, taking it up in the House. I think that is what would happen. There are a lot of them over there saying, no, they don't want to do that. They want to have a part-time, short-term extension to the end of the year because I think they can get that into some kind of tax reform.

Again, you miss a construction season, and you are wasting valuable time and money. So we do not want to do that, but I want to get into some of these tales, talking about our bridges. There are over 60,000 structurally deficient bridges in this country. The first chart shows—the diagram there—the darker color, that is where the heaviest, the more serious problems are right now.

Look at my State of Oklahoma. For a Western State, we have greater problems than many of the States have. In fact, one out of every four bridges is structurally deficient. The American Society of Civil Engineers gives our bridges a grade of C+.

Now, how did we get here? President Eisenhower's legacy system was built with a 50-year lifespan. In many parts of this country we have exceeded that lifespan. We are out of warranty, I say to the Chair. That is why we need to get it done. MAP-21 was the right step for bringing us into the 21st century, but a long-term solution has been needed to fix the \$112 billion in backlog of rehabilitation for our Nation's bridges.

So 430 of the 435 congressional districts have structurally deficient bridges. This means that all but five Members of the House of Representatives have bridges back home in need of major repair in their districts. This is everybody's problem.

In my State of Oklahoma we have two of the top 10 worst districts by number of deficient bridges. One of our districts is ranked second in the Nation. Congressman FRANK LUCAS's district is a rural district that covers about half of the State, but there aren't many people in there. He said there are over 2,000 deficient bridges just in one congressional district. In Congressman MARKWAYNE MULLIN's district, there are 1,205 deficient bridges.

I know firsthand that the Oklahoma Department of Transportation has worked tirelessly to address the needs for bridge safety, but they need longer term certainty in a Federal partnership to make this happen. This is what this bill is all about. In light of the Nation's bridges, we have to do more to prioritize safety and stability. We can't wait around for another collapse to fix the crumbling bridges. A bridge collapse or closure brings significant and sudden economic impacts to the impacted region.

The economic cost of the I-35 West bridge collapse in Minnesota—and we all remember that; that was all over the news in 2007—averaged \$400,000 a day of economic loss. The Minnesota Department of Transportation found that the State's economy lost \$60 million as a direct result of the collapse.

This is that bridge, as shown in this picture I have in the Chamber. You remember that it had a lot of publicity at the time. Then all of a sudden it is kind of a wake-up call. People realize this is for real. We need to do something about it.

In 2013, the Skagit River Bridge collapse on Interstate 5 in Washington State had similar effects on the local economy, with an estimated impact of \$8.3 million during the 26-day closure and repair of this bridge.

The Brent Spence Bridge is a bridge in need of repair. It connects Cincinnati, OH, to Kentucky. This is an old bridge, which you can see just by looking at it. That is one that would have to be replaced.

It would be impossible to do that in anything except a long-term bill. You cannot do that with short-term fixes. Nobody argues that point. That is a fact.

Senator ROB PORTMAN of Ohio and SHERROD BROWN of Ohio are very much concerned about this bridge. They are on one side of this bridge, and in Kentucky we have Senator MITCH MCCONNELL and Senator RAND PAUL. This bridge is functionally obsolete. It was built in 1963. The bridge is more than 50 years old and is designed to carry more than 85,000 cars a day, but by 2025 it is expected to carry 200,000 cars a day.

According to the American Transportation Research Institute, the Brent Spence Bridge is the fourth most congested truck point in the U.S. infrastructure grid. The cost in congestion is staggering when you consider that \$420 billion in freight crosses the bridge every year.

Freight haulers bear the brunt in congestion costs and delays associated with just traveling across the bridge, which cost the trucker almost \$40 during rush hour. What we are talking about there is that when cars and trucks are going over this bridge, they are stopped. It is a choke point. So they are sitting there, their engines are idling, and there is a tremendous cost. So in the aggregate, the delays on the bridge cost travelers over \$750 million each year in wasted time and fuel. Each year, 1.6 million gallons of fuel are wasted due to congestion on this bridge.

Senators JEFF SESSIONS and RICHARD SHELBY are very concerned about the I-10 Mobile River Bridge in Alabama. Currently, traffic is carried through the George C. Wallace Tunnel, the I-10 crossing under the Mobile River in Alabama.

Constructed in the 1970s, the tunnel was designed with an anticipated daily traffic count—this is the tunnel—of 36,000 vehicles. Currently, the tunnel averages approximately 80,000 vehicles a day and can reach as many as 100,000 vehicles in peak season. The traffic volume causes heavy congestion. This is as it is today. There is a proposed project to relieve the congestion and increase mobility, but it is not going to happen unless we have this bill pass.

Arlington Memorial Bridge connects Virginia to DC. Probably, most people who are here today have been across this bridge. They see what condition it is in. It was built in 1932. The Arlington Memorial Bridge is well beyond its design life.

It is structurally deficient. We know what the traffic is like on that bridge. The bridge serves as a significant part of the National Highway System, a major evacuation route, and carries more than 68,000 vehicles each day, including commuters, residents, dignitaries, and official ceremonies. My staff tells me this bridge is on the news on a regular basis due to progressive deterioration. The government has had to conduct emergency-lane closures and enforce a load limit. Repair work will take 6 months to 9 months.

The I-264 bridge over Lynnhaven Parkway carries traffic to Virginia Beach. It is a popular vacation spot. A lot of people here go there with regularity, and they know what this bridge is about. I have crossed this bridge many times. It is one of the 10 most heavily traveled deficient bridges in the State of Virginia. It carries just under 135,000 cars a day.

The Magnolia Bridge is in Seattle, WA. I always wondered why they called that the Magnolia Bridge. There aren't any magnolia trees in that part of the north that I know of. But nonetheless that is what it is. But it was built in 1929. Just imagine that. It is from 1929, and everyone recognizes the dangers that are involved. The bridge carries 18,000 cars a day and is structurally deficient. While the bridge is in a residential area and on the community's radar, it hasn't received necessary funding to reconstruct the 86-year-old bridge.

Greenfield Bridge in Pittsburgh is in the area of the chairman of the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee of the House of Representatives. Pennsylvania has the most structurally deficient bridges in the country, and this is just one of them. It was built in 1921 and now carries 7,782 cars a day. A 10-inch chunk of concrete went through a car windshield in 2003, injuring the driver. Later that year, the city spent some \$652,000 to build a temporary bridge to catch whatever came through the nets. In other words, there is a bridge under this bridge.

This same thing happened in my State of Oklahoma with a bridge in Oklahoma City. It wasn't long ago. By the way, that bridge was taken care of in the 2005 bill. It was the last long-term bill that we have had. I recall vividly a mother with three children driving under it. A chunk of concrete fell off and killed the mother instantly. Of course, that got everyone's attention, and then we passed the last reauthorization bill, which was 2005. Greenfield Bridge deals with the similar hazardous issue. They have to build a bridge under the bridge to catch falling debris.

This is the Pittsburgh Greenfield Bridge. Repairing bridges like these cannot be done with short-term fixes.

There is the Court Avenue Bridge in Des Moines, IA. That happens to be where I was born. It is represented now by Senator CHUCK GRASSLEY and Senator JONI ERNST. Iowa has the second most number of structurally deficient bridges in the country. It was built in 1918, and it now carries 3,920 cars per day. While the State recently increased the State gas tax, it will still require Federal partnership to ensure progress on fixing this bridge. It is not going to be done without long-term certainty.

There is the Brandywine Bridge on I-95 in Wilmington, DE, which is not far from here. Senator COONS and Senator CARPER should be very much concerned about that. That is a 50-year-old bridge. The bridge deck is deteriorating. The viaduct, which carries travelers on I-95, is a major road. If you go from here to New York City, you are talking about I-95, one of the most traveled interstates. It goes through Wilmington and has experienced serious concrete corrosion. In this structure, the substructure has cracks and spalls and is in need of repair. This is another dangerous site. It is not going to be done in the absence of the passage of this bill.

As to the Chef Menteur Pass in New Orleans, I am sure Senator BILL CASSIDY and Senator VITTER are concerned. It was built in 1930. It carries 1,800 cars a day across Highway 90.

Then there is Cesar Chavez Boulevard in San Francisco. That was built in 1951 and carries 234,000 cars per day. It is one of the older bridges on the west coast that needs to be repaired.

In Little Rock, AR, getting very close to my area, Senator TOM COTTON and Senator JOHN BOOZMAN are very much concerned about this. They should be. I am sure they are. It is structurally deficient. It was built in 1961 and carries traffic over railroad tracks—116,000 cars a day. Arkansas is delaying projects because of uncertainty at the Federal level. That is what this bill is all about.

The Storrow Drive Bridge is in Boston, MA, and Senator WARNER and Senator MARKEY will be concerned. It was built in 1951. This structurally deficient bridge carries 57,770 cars per day. The Storrow Drive Bridge earned its structurally deficient rating because of the corroding support beams that support one of the many highly trafficked bridges in the Nation. I have crossed that one several times.

We have the U.S. 1-9 over the Passaic River in Newark, NJ. Senator BOOKER and Senator MENENDEZ are concerned about that. Herbert Hoover was President when the bridge was built in 1932 with an estimated design volume of 5,500 vehicles a day. It is now up to 62,700 vehicles per day.

The Calcasieu River Bridge in Lake Charles, LA, was built in 1952 and is a structurally deficient bridge that now carries 70,100 cars per day. Its steep

grades have been cited as a traffic concern, especially given the high volume of trucks that bridge carries along the major east-west corridor.

The Brooklyn Bridge—everyone knows about the Brooklyn Bridge. The pages are too young to remember this, but that was back when Johnny Weissmuller was Tarzan. Did you see any of the old movies? He dove off the Brooklyn Bridge. I remember that from when I was your age. Do you know when that was built? That was built in 1883. This structurally deficient bridge now carries 135,000 cars a day. That is one of the oldest ones around. I remember so well when Johnny Weissmuller was chased by the police and dove down. I always wondered what happened to him.

The San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge—San Francisco to Oakland, CA—was built in 1936. This bridge is now functionally obsolete, yet it carries 204,900 cars per day, and there are many fears that the bridge might collapse.

That is what happened in Minnesota. You cannot wait until that happens to avoid the disasters. You can almost imagine if this bridge collapsed. People are concerned about it because that is right in the middle of earthquake country. And if you take something that is already structurally deficient and you give it a little bit of tremor, it could go.

In Missouri, Senator BLUNT and Senator MCCASKILL ought to be concerned. It is one State that would significantly benefit from the DRIVE Act and the long-term certainty it provides. Missouri has the fourth most structurally deficient bridges in the country, with 3,310 of them. Furthermore, Missouri has three districts ranked in the top 20 for worst bridges. The district of House Representative GRAVES has 1,345 deficient bridges, Representative SMITH has 615 deficient bridges, and Representative HARTZLER has 600 deficient bridges. Dennis Heckman, Missouri's DOT State bridge engineer, agrees that the State needs to seriously address its aging bridges. It is clear when he says that "they're in bad condition, they're worn out."

Broadway Bridge in Kansas City is a prime example of a structurally deficient bridge desperately in need of reconstruction. Built in 1955, this bridge is beyond its design life and has to support over 45,000 cars a day.

The Interstate 70 bridge over Havana Street and the Union Pacific Railroad is in Denver. CORY GARDNER is very familiar with this, as is Senator BENNET. This is the most traveled structurally deficient bridge in the State of Colorado. Built in 1964, it has 183,000 daily crossings. Every day 3.7 million Coloradans cross this structurally deficient bridge.

The DRIVE Act will work to make these bridges safer for all travelers.

Getting toward the end here—and there are a lot more—the Russell Street Bridge is in Missoula, MT. I was

actually on that when I was up there during STEVE DAINES' election recently. Transportation For America graded the deck of the Russell Street Bridge a 4 in a soundness scale of 1 through 10. The Russell Street Bridge was built in 1957 and carries 22,650 cars per day.

In light of these decaying bridges, the DRIVE Act will provide adequate infrastructure investment for our Nation's bridges. Senator BARBARA BOXER and I made that a top priority in the DRIVE Act, and I think it is something we need to keep in mind.

We have an opportunity to move to this bill this afternoon. The vote hasn't been scheduled yet. It needs to happen today. It will be a motion to proceed to the highway reauthorization bill, and it is one that will get us so that we can start working on amendments. We have a lot of amendments. A lot of people are using this. They know the bill has to pass. This falls into the category of a must-pass bill. Everybody knows, for the reasons I have been talking about for several days, it is going to have to pass. So there are a lot of people who have amendments that have nothing to do with bridges and nothing to do with the roads. That is OK. This is a vehicle they can use to try to get other programs through. In fact, I myself may be guilty of that. But nonetheless we can't do any of that until we get to the bill, so the motion to proceed has to be agreed to.

As soon as the motion to proceed is adopted, I would encourage all Members to come forth with their amendments so they can be heard before any deadlines pass.

With that, I yield the floor.

Mr. President, I suggest the absence of a quorum.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. The clerk will call the roll.

The legislative clerk proceeded to call the roll.

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the order for the quorum call be rescinded.

The PRESIDING OFFICER. Without objection, it is so ordered.

AMENDMENTS TO VA BILL

Mr. TILLIS. Mr. President, we were sworn in—you and I both—in January, and I know we have both gone to our States and traveled across our States to get an idea of the pressing problems our States and our Nation face. One of the areas I have focused most of my attention on is veterans affairs, particularly the hospitals and the services we are providing veterans across the State.

I am concerned that we have a problem with priorities. I am concerned that maybe the focus isn't where it needs to be to make sure we take care of the most pressing problems for our veterans. Whether it is the Choice Act, whether it is just providing ambulatory care, PTSD, mental health, or a number of other things, we have short-

ages, and we need to get the Veterans' Administration focused on solving the most pressing problems.

I decided we needed to produce some amendments that would have been heard today in the Committee on Veterans' Affairs for a bill that would affect the VA. Why would I want to do that? Because when out of the blue a proposal for some \$500 million in unanticipated costs could potentially be considered today, I get worried. And I will talk later about the various things that make me worry about what would be lost if we were to reprioritize half a billion dollars, with all the things we already have on our plate that deal with the VA.

But the amendments some of my colleagues on the other side of the aisle were talking about earlier today were my responsibility. They referred—I guess in deference—to Republicans. The reality is that they were amendments that came out of my office, and I want to talk a little about what these amendments were. They were referred to as political games, but three of them were very focused on good government. One of them was to make sure we do not implement policy that moves a priority or moves something ahead of the line of the other critical priorities we have for our veterans. All it said was that we would not fund this project until we had certification that the most pressing priorities—which I will talk about in a few minutes—had actually been addressed.

Another amendment was just about reporting—how does this project work? All too often we pass policies here and we never measure the results. That is what is wrong with Washington. We don't think through the full consequences of a lot of the policies we implement. So it was simply to provide a reporting mechanism so we could follow up on this policy and see what it costs and the real benefits over time.

The last amendment is something I know the Presiding Officer has problems with because he is a very successful businessman. In business, we would never think about balancing the books for this year and next year based on what the business is going to do 10 years from now, but that is exactly what nearly half of the \$500 million that was to be used for this bill would have done. It is reaching all the way out to 2025 to assume that some savings achieved there could be used to pay for something today. That is not the way we need to be budgeting in Washington. We have an \$18 trillion deficit—or I should say debt—and a lot of that is this kind of thinking that has been going on in Washington for too long—and I might add, under Democratic and Republican leadership. We have to change.

The other amendments were fairly straightforward too. So three amendments on good government and accountability and responsible budgeting. The other three were things I think most Americans would agree with.

One would simply prevent taxpayer funds from being used—the whole bill, I should have mentioned, has to do with providing in vitro fertilization coverage for veterans. One of the amendments simply said: You cannot use taxpayer funds to do any form of sex selection with respect to determining which embryo may be able to come to life versus the other ones that couldn't. Another amendment has to do with something as simple as not having the VA work with organizations that take the organs of human aborted babies and sell them. Those are the sorts of amendments we were talking about. It wasn't to kill in vitro fertilization. I know of many friends and others who have actually benefited and brought babies into the world through in vitro fertilization. This was about making sure we did it in a responsible manner.

But the heart of my problem goes back to the long list of broken promises that sooner or later this Congress has to fulfill for our veterans. Let's talk a little about those. We are talking about taking half a billion dollars and spending it on some priority that is not even on the books today.

What about these priorities? I worry about the 120,000 claims currently in the VA backlog. These are people who served our country who are looking for medical help and who are in the backlog waiting for treatment. What about that priority?

What about the 22 veterans on average a day committing suicide, most of them related to PTSD? We passed the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention Act as a first step toward trying to address this chronic problem. At the time we passed it, we all acknowledged that the funding we gave it wasn't enough, but it was a start.

What about additional funding for men and women who are suffering from various traumas they experience in service to our Nation? That is a priority we need to be absolutely certain is provided for.

I also worry about the unemployment problems. I think 75 percent of the Iran and Afghanistan veterans are dealing with unemployment once they transition from military service into the private sector. What about initiatives to get them back to work, take care of them and their families?

I could go on and on.

At Camp Lejeune in my great State of North Carolina, we have identified something that occurred over many years—exposure to toxic substances which have been linked to cancer. I had a meeting just last week with the Secretary of the VA. Only 13 percent of the requests for coverage are being fulfilled. We think it should be closer to 50 or 60. What about the funding for those folks who contracted cancer as a result of toxic substances at Camp Lejeune? Don't they deserve to be somewhere higher in the priority list?

I could go on and on.

There are the wait times, the critical medical services they need.